

Of Swamps, Hollows, Bellows and Gardens

By TONY KELSO

The Dead Swamp sounds like something out of a horror movie, and for centuries it was a place that Duxbury residents did try to avoid if they could, but mainly because it got their feet wet, bogged down their horses and was an impasse in traveling north and west.

The easiest place to see the Dead Swamp is on either side of Route 3 between the interchange at exit 10 and the Elm Street bridge over the highway. Neighborhoods like Forge Way, Stagecoach Road and the Island Creek apartment buildings fringe the swamp. It is a very dense inland swamp that waters the Island Creek cranberry bogs behind Bennett's store, and a small stream known as Mile Brook, which is largely in Kingston.

How did the swamp get its name? You could guess it came from a number of dead trees, since the swamp was originally thickly set with cedars, but looking at the swamp today, its trees are thriving and far from dead. The Duxbury historian Arnold Freeman, who wrote about the Island Creek neighborhood from the perspective of his boyhood in the 1820s, said that it got its name from the fact that a dead body concealed in the brush was once found in the swamp. This certainly could have happened, but nothing in the records says when this death occurred or who this unlucky person might have been.

For the local Wampanoag and Massachuset Native Americans, and later the Plymouth colonists, the Dead Swamp posed considerable difficulty in creating trails and roads heading north to Massachusetts Bay (Boston). The original path followed the drier ground around the swamp. After the path crossed the Jones River, it roughly followed today's Oak Street as it skirts the bogs behind Bennett's store and then the path headed north and west up a hill where today is Forge Way. It joined today's Elm Street at about the Route 3 overpass and then headed towards Pembroke and Boston. This was known as the Massachusetts or Bay path and was the original main way north from the Plymouth and Jones River area. Remains of the old way could still be seen as late as the late 1950s when the construction of Route 3 began. Following this route, the path avoided the wet and boggy conditions of the Dead Swamp.

The path also swung west, away from what was once called Schoolhouse Hollow. This old name was for the hollow in the topography in Tinkertown that can still be seen today at the intersection of Oak and Elm streets. The schoolhouse that lent its name to the hollow and later to the adjacent street (School Street) stood on the higher ground just east of the pres-

ent Elm Street bridge over Route 3. The schoolhouse operated from 1715 until the 1830s and served the families of Tinkertown, Island Creek and the Tarkiln neighborhoods. At first thought, the location seems remote for a schoolhouse since there were few houses nearby. Remember it stood along the way that was used frequently by anyone heading north towards Boston or south towards Plymouth. By 1763, Elm and Tobey Garden streets also added traffic and made a direct connection from the center of Duxbury to West Duxbury.

Tobey Garden is a funny, old name that doesn't have a clear story. It is first mentioned in the road layout of 1763. "Tobey's Garden Hill" was the hill that the street travels down before Island Creek Pond. There were no Tobey families recorded as living in Duxbury that early. The only one known to have that name was Tabitha Tobey Freeman who came to live in the Island Creek area with her husband Joseph Freeman. She was from Sandwich originally and one record describes her as an "Indian princess." In other words, she was possibly a native Wampanoag. Possibly she had a relative, a Tobey, who came and lived or farmed in that area and so lent their name to the hill and eventually the street.

What remained of the local native groups, either

Wampanoag or Massachuset from the Pembroke Ponds, by the 1760s lived on the fringes of towns like Duxbury. Although they were a visible presence during that time, they tended to live in the sparsely settled areas of towns and tried living off the land, only coming in contact with English families when they were selling things like blueberries and hand woven baskets. We catch barely a glimmer of them in the old records; it is mainly in old place names like Tobey Garden that we see there were others living in Duxbury than just descendants of the English settlers.

Beyond Tobey Garden Hill, through Tinkertown and up from the hollow to the high ground where the schoolhouse once stood, was known as "The Mouth of the Bellows." The area was so bleak and windy where the present Route 3 Elm Street bridge is, it felt like the bellows of a blacksmith was blowing as travelers hurried through the area.

So on any cold and wintry night as you drive your car down Tobey Garden Hill heading west, be thankful for your car's heating system and that you are skirting around the Dead Swamp through Schoolhouse Hollow, and at the top of the hill at the bridge over Route 3 you are missing the icy blasts of the Mouth of Bellows.